

PSALM 22

The persecuted Son will nevertheless reign

“To the choirmaster” – therefore this was meant as a song of worship for the entire community.

Obviously this Psalm is about Jesus Christ. The experiences of the sufferer exactly match those recorded of Christ as he hung upon the cross:

- Verse 7-8 – “All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; “He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!” See Matthew 27:27-31, 39-40.
- Verse 18 – “They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” See Matthew 27:35.

And most students leave it at that – this is a prophecy of the crucifixion of Christ.

But there’s a deeper theme running here. We have to ask three questions to bring it to light.

First, *why is the sufferer shocked that God had forsaken him?* This was not just a rhetorical question. God had always wanted a son pleasing to him. From the very beginning he has wanted to see a man who lived a righteous and holy life, a son who would share his glory, learn his wisdom, utilize his power on earth, and sit on the throne at his right hand over all the earth in authority and majesty. And for the first time in human history this is exactly what God has now in Christ. So – why did he let this perfect Son die a gruesome death as a criminal? For that matter, why did the Son live in humble circumstances, without glory, hidden in the masses of humanity as if he were no better than the rest, even though his qualities would obviously set him apart from the rest? It didn’t make sense that the one time in history that God had what he wanted in a man, he would throw away the opportunity.

Second, *why are these people attacking the sufferer with such fury and hatred?* We have a striking image here of the crowd surrounding Christ like “bulls of Bashan”; like “dogs” the evildoers encompass him, they pierce him and jeer at him. They are determined to destroy him.

This is only the violent forms of the animosity against Christ. There are many other forms that, in reality, the whole of humanity use against him. Here is a perfect Man who is pleasing to his Father. And yet we all abuse him in some way: some despise him, some ignore him, some mock him, some fear and avoid him, some rebel against him, some reject him – there are many ways we try to push him away and out of our lives. Pilate washed his hands of him.

And the problem didn’t show itself only at the scene of the Crucifixion. Jesus encountered resistance and hatred and complaints and rejection during his entire ministry. In fact, it started at his birth – the authorities rejected the whole notion of God in the flesh, the presence of the Messiah, who would challenge their rebellious ways.

The problem is that *we don't like this Man*. And the reason is simple: he is what we are supposed to be. Our Creator has sent a perfect Man into our midst as a Light, a testimony, to make it clear to us just how far short we have fallen in his sight.

But the simplistic image that humanity has of the perfections of Christ doesn't come close to the fullness of his glory. We have to remind ourselves that Christ came to fulfill the Old Testament description of God's Son – all of it. The Son of God is destined for great things.

- **A New Creation** – a Man who is spiritually alive to God and his world
- **God's Heir** – he inherits the fullness of the Treasures of Heaven
- **Holy** – delivered and set apart to God in all things
- **The Priest** – the Son lives in God's House serving God and man
- **The King** – he rules over God's Kingdom according to God's Law
- **Wisdom** – the Son learns the mind of his Father – his Ways and Works
- **The Prophet** – it is through the Son that God reveals himself to others

This program is a huge undertaking. It requires a passion for God, a life dedicated to God, and achieving things on a majestic scale – something that sinners do *not* like at all. They want to do their own thing, not God's.

So it becomes clearer why all these people hated Christ so much. *First*, they didn't like the visual reminder of the contrast between the beloved Son and themselves. God was making it plain what he thought of them: they don't measure up compared to this image of God in Christ. *Second*, they especially didn't like the message of the Christ: "Take up your cross and follow me." Put aside your sinful flesh, be filled with my Spirit, and "be perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect." The entire ministry of the Christ was to transform them into his own image.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
(Romans 8:29)

There's something else tragic going on in this scene. As sinners react to Jesus (they can't help but react – everyone is either for him or against him), their true nature comes to the surface. If God ever needed proof on Judgment Day of what we really are, here it is. *Everyone* who hears about the Christ immediately uncovers their hearts before him: they either hate, despise, ignore, rebel against, or reject him; or they love him. His own disciples denied him and hid from him in fear.

People are either trying desperately to get away from God and his expectations of them, or they surrender to him. There is never any in-between position when it comes to the Christ. And again, the reason is simple: in Christ, God is showing us what he wants to see in us, and the burden of the thing is overwhelming. We refuse to align ourselves with him – this is more "perfection" than we want. It requires a total transformation, a complete change of direction, dropping our present lives and taking on a new life, giving up this world for the sake of the next world – the demands are limitless and spiritual. That's why, in the sight of God, a halfway measure toward Christianity is not good

enough. A few additions and changes to our lives to accommodate the teachings of Christ are not enough to redirect us away from eternal destruction and punishment. It requires the same passion and life-changing holiness that the Christ shows us. It requires, in fact, a union with the Son so that his Life and Spirit lives in us, and we in him. There can only be one Son before the Father.

So the world throws itself in hatred and rejection against this Man who so clearly proves his superiority over them. And in their reactions, they reveal themselves.

It hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. (John 7:7)

Third, *why must the sufferer endure the full agony and shame and die in the end?* There won't be any rescue before death. The guilt of those who hate him must work itself out in full: they eliminate this Son from their presence. They kill him and have done with him. Now they have set themselves against their God and created a crisis, a war, a situation in which God must resort to drastic measures. They have declared and proven their hatred for, and alienation against, God and his perfect Son. God needs no further evidence of the nature of their hearts. Now (as the saying goes) the ball is in God's court. It's his move now.

And his first move is to raise his Son from the dead. It's true – God loves this Son. He's not going to let the only perfect Man “go the way of all the earth.”

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.

You have made known to me the paths of life;

you will make me full of gladness with your presence. (Acts 2:27-28)

It's through the Resurrection that we learn the determination of the Father to save this Son and his perfections, and use him as the Pattern for new sons and daughters. For there *will* be a few here and there who will not reject or despise the perfect Son but turn to him in hope for their own change into his image. They too feel the sting of the conviction of the perfection of the Son as compared to their own sinful hearts and lives. But rather than react in hatred against him, they reach out to him in desperation to make them like himself, to draw them into himself, so that they might see the Father also and be pleasing to him.

And so the Son teaches his new brothers about the fullness of the Son of God, the destiny they will share in him.

I will tell of your name to my brothers;

in the midst of the congregation I will praise you. (Psalms 22:22)

The message is that in spite of the whole world's rejection of the Christ, God raises his Son to newness of life. The brothers are going to need this instruction because the world will hate them too as they bear the image of the Son of God in their lives.

I have given them your Word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (John 17:14)

Again, the world hates God's people for the same reasons that they hate the Christ – they are a visible Light showing the perfections of the Son in their own lives, and a condemnation of the world's sins by comparison. Christians *expect* rejection. Paul tells us this:

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. (Philippians 1:27-30)

But the unfailing hope is that just as God didn't leave his perfect Son in the grave, neither will he leave his other children helpless. They will have to endure the wrath of the unbelievers, but in the end "the prosperous will bow down to God" and turn to dust, and God's people will sit at his right hand on the throne of Heaven over all the earth in victory.

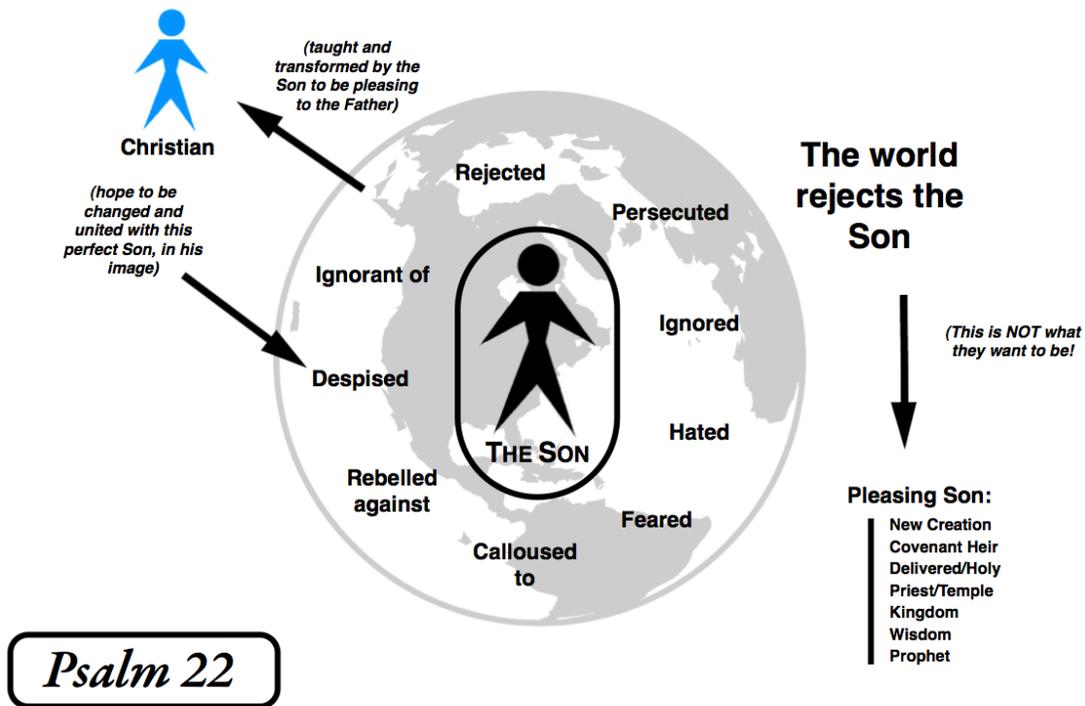
The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:9-13)

Notice too that this hope is given to "the offspring of Jacob," "the offspring of Israel." As Paul told us, "the Gospel was preached beforehand to Abraham" (see Galatians 3:7-9). From the very beginning God dealt with the world at large, and with Abraham's Family in particular, along the same lines. Amongst the pagans God raised up an Heir for a life separate from the world, and his Family has always been despised, ignored, persecuted, shoved aside, and rejected. But in the end, those of the world die and come to nothing, and those of Abraham's Family rise up to the full inheritance of the Son of God.

So, God isn't throwing away the opportunity of a perfect Son on earth. He's accomplishing three things: *first*, he's showing us what he considers a Son "pleasing to him." *Second*, he's deliberately exposing our rejection of this Pattern; now it's no secret that we are not like the Son, and we will go to any measure to get rid of this constant reminder of our failure. *Third*, in spite of our rejection he's going to lift this Son up to a new level and make in him a new Family who will live up to the expectations, and inherit the richness of the inheritance, of the eternal Father.

Psalm 22 is not just a prophecy, then, of the crucifixion of Christ. It's the revelation of the reception (or we could say the rejection) that the perfect Son experiences in this world of sinners, and the reward for the Son in spite of his rejection.

THE FATHER



The world rejects the Son:

A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!” But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written:”

‘The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone’? (Luke 20:9-17)